

LOBSTER RESEARCH PROGRAM
MAINE DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

TRAP LIMITS

Lobster Informational Leaflet #6

February 1979

TRAP LIMITS

Because of recent discussions on trap limits by many people involved in the commercial lobster fishery in Maine, it might be useful to report on the number of traps per boat that the Department of Marine Resources compiles by interviewing fishermen at dockside during the sampling for lobster catch and effort information (the sampling procedure is described in Lobster Informational Leaflet number 1).

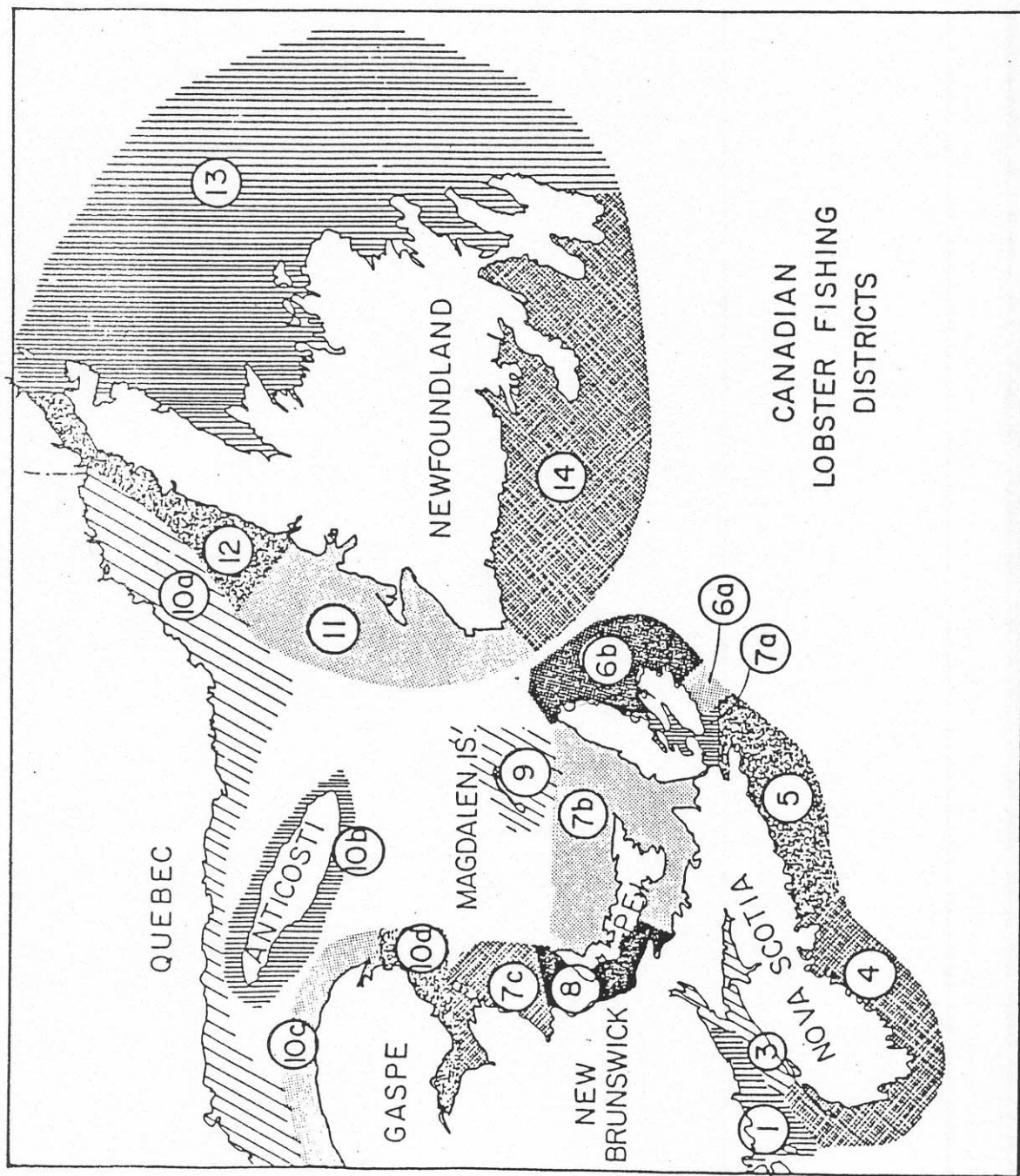
During 1978, 81.4% of the lobster boats along the entire coast fished less than 500 traps apiece; surprisingly, 23.5% of the fishermen reported that they used between 200 and 300 traps (Figure 1). Before fishermen in some areas of the state start jumping up and down that this reported number of traps per boat is too low, the entire range of traps per boat goes out to more than 1000 traps (>1000 in figure). In fact, in Casco Bay there are some lobstermen who fish over 2000 traps per boat. Still the percentage of vessels and fishermen who use 1000 traps or more on a yearly basis is only 1 to 2% of the total along the entire coast; for example, if there were 8,000 boats fishing for lobsters then 80 to 160 boats were using 1000 traps or more.

To help in the deliberation on trap limits, it might be well to consider the experience in Canada whereby they started trap limits, restrictions on the number of fishermen, and seasons in the late 1960's (Table 1, map of districts attached). The trap limits by lobster district in Canada are set lower than any being discussed here in Maine; yet, in some districts, the Canadian fishermen landed 80 to 90% of their catch in the first 6 to 8 weeks of, say, a 12 week season. According to authorities and fishermen in Canada, the reason for the higher catch rate in a short period of time is that they haul their diminished number of traps more frequently than when they could

Table 1. Seasons, Size Limits, Maximum and Minimum Trap Limits, and Number of Fishermen by Lobster Districts in Atlantic Provinces, 1975.

| <u>District</u> | <u>Season</u> | <u>Maximum Trap Limit</u> | <u>Minimum Trap Limit (Class A)</u> | <u>Number of Lobster Fishermen* Annual Average 1969-1972</u> |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Nov. 15-June 24 | 375 | 75 | 605 |
| 3 | Oct. 15-Dec. 31 Mar. 1-July 20 | 300 | 75 | 214 |
| 4 West | Last Tues. Nov.- May 31 | 375 | 75 | 2,387 |
| 4 East | Last Tues. Nov.- May 31 | 250 | 50 | 1,689 |
| 5 | Apr. 10-June 30 | 250 | 50 | 922 |
| 6A | May 20-July 20 | 300 | 75 | 98 |
| 6B | May 16-July 15 | 375 | 75 | 1,063 |
| 7A | May 1-June 30 | 375 | 75 | 129 |
| 7B | May 1-June 30 | 400 | 100 | 3,161 |
| 7C | May 1-June 30 | 375 | 100 | 1,167 |
| 8 | Aug. 10-Oct. 10 | 250 | 100 | 2,062 |
| 9 | May 10-July 10 | 300 | 300 | 887 |
| 10A | May 20-July 31 | 300 | n.a. | 82 |
| 10B | June 15-Aug. 15 | 300 | n.a. | |
| 10C | May 10-July 27 | 300 | n.a. | 696 |
| 10D | May 1-July 17 | 300 | n.a. | |
| 11 | Apr. 20-July 5 | n.a. | n.a. | 1,198 |
| 12 | May 5-July 10 | n.a. | n.a. | 966 |
| 13 | Apr. 20-July 15 | n.a. | n.a. | 2,866 |
| 14 | Apr. 20-June 30 | n.a. | n.a. | 1,033 |

*Includes helpers.



fish any number of traps they wanted.

In close association with the discussion on trap limits, many fishermen in Maine maintain that it makes no sense to have trap limits and not a limit on the number of lobstermen. They feel that no limit on the number of fishermen would soon lead to the same total number of traps that was being fished prior to the trap limit. This problem was considered in Canada by setting the number of fishermen in each district at the level that already existed prior to so-called limited entry. The licenses were separated into class A or B. Class A licensees fished the maximum number of traps allowed during the entire fishing season. The owner of this type of license has the option (after his fishing days) of (1) selling the license to the highest bidder, or (2) giving his license to his wife, son, or daughter. On the other hand, class B licensees could fish 100 traps or less, but the license was retired when the applicant did not renew his yearly license. In this way, the number of class B licensees is gradually reduced over time until there are no more class B licenses.

Taking all of the above factors into consideration, it appears that lobstermen in Maine may expect to catch the same total poundage of lobsters with a 500 to 600 trap limit as they did before the limit, coupled with a possible reduction in overhead costs for some fishermen who have to reduce their total number of traps down to 500 or 600. Further, there is a good case for considering a method for gradual reduction in the number of lobster licenses.

Figure 1. The percentage of boats separated into one hundred trap categories.

1978
COAST WIDE

Based on a sample of 340
lobster boats.

